

The Rearwin Speedster

Unfulfilled Dreams

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY GILLES AULIARD

While not a top-tier airplane manufacturer, Rearwin Airplanes Inc., founded in 1928 in Kansas City, Kansas, produced a line of rugged high-wing cabin monoplanes that are fondly remembered, culminating with the postwar-era Commonwealth Skyraider 185. One of its least numerous models, however, forever holds a special place in the hearts of modelers and pilots alike: the 6000 Speedster.

Designed by Noel Hockaday and Douglas Webber, the Speedster first took flight on July 11, 1934. Powered by the 95-hp air-cooled in-line four-cylinder ADC Cirrus Hi-Drive engine of English manufacture, the Speedster's sleek lines suggested speed and class.

Confirming this first impression, company test pilot J. B. "Jack" LeClaire, came back enthusiastic from the short hop, touting the Speedster's performance. The model 6000, however, could not meet the stringent U.S. Department of Commerce certification requirements for spin recovery.

After more than three years of modifications and a complete redesign of the tail section of the airplane, the Rearwin Model 6000C (C for Cirrus) was awarded ATC #653 on September 28, 1937. According to test pilot Bill Miller, however, the original airplane was an altogether better machine.



The Rearwin 6000C might have been one of the sleekest light airplanes of the period. However, it took so long to pass government certification tests that technology (in the form of the Continental A-65 engine) had passed it by, so it never went into production.



The 95-hp, four-cylinder, inverted, air-cooled Cirrus engine gave the airplane a distinctive look.

The C/N 302, the second and last Rearwin 6000C, rolled out of the Fairfax County Airport Rearwin facility on May 25, 1936. It was registered the following day to R. A. Rearwin as X-15865 (X for experimental), its certificate bearing the mention: "Demonstration purpose only. No person may be carried away except bona fide members of the crew."

Transferred to the Rearwin company on August 25, 1937, with the commercial registration NC15865, C/N 302 remained a demonstration machine until it was sold to Rudolph Edward Collioud of Montclair, New Jersey, on July 1, 1939. After a succession of owners, including Dexter D. Coffin in 1962–63, the Rearwin ended up in the early '80s in the hands of Aubrey Weeks of San Leandro, California, who sold it to Eric Rearwin on April 10, 2003. Eric acquired the airplane as a tribute to his grandfather Ken Rearwin and his great-grandfather, company founder Raymond Andrew Rearwin. Even though Eric is not a pilot, he saw NC15865 as a family artifact that needed to be preserved and flown.

Entrusting the eight-year restoration process to Tim Talen's the Ragwood Refactory, the Rearwin took its first flight after its rebirth



The pilot's view to either side of the nose was excellent and the instrumentation minimal.

in August 2011. According to Tim Talen, the Speedster flies like every airplane should fly.

"The elevator is very positive, the rudder very nice, and the ailerons work pretty well, even in crosswind conditions. Crosswind landings are easy to control, and you can straighten the wings with the ailerons down to stall speed. You even still have some aileron control on the ground."

The Rearwin Speedster is a rare living icon of a bygone era. ✈



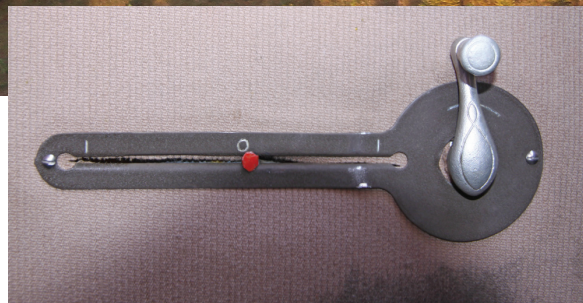
The 6000C's lines, including the in-line cowling, have made the airplane a longtime favorite of radio-control modelers.



The sole remaining example was owned by Eric Rearwin, the grandson of the founder, who put it through an eight-year restoration at Tim Talen's Ragwood Refactory in Oregon.



The tall tail surface was a feature that, along with the long nose, made the airplane readily identifiable.



Left, top: The elevator trim by the pilot's left elbow was simple and positive.



Left, bottom: With fuel tanks in both wings, the selector valve gave the pilot the ability to feed from one or both tanks. Thirty-four gallons of fuel is a lot for an aircraft of this size.